

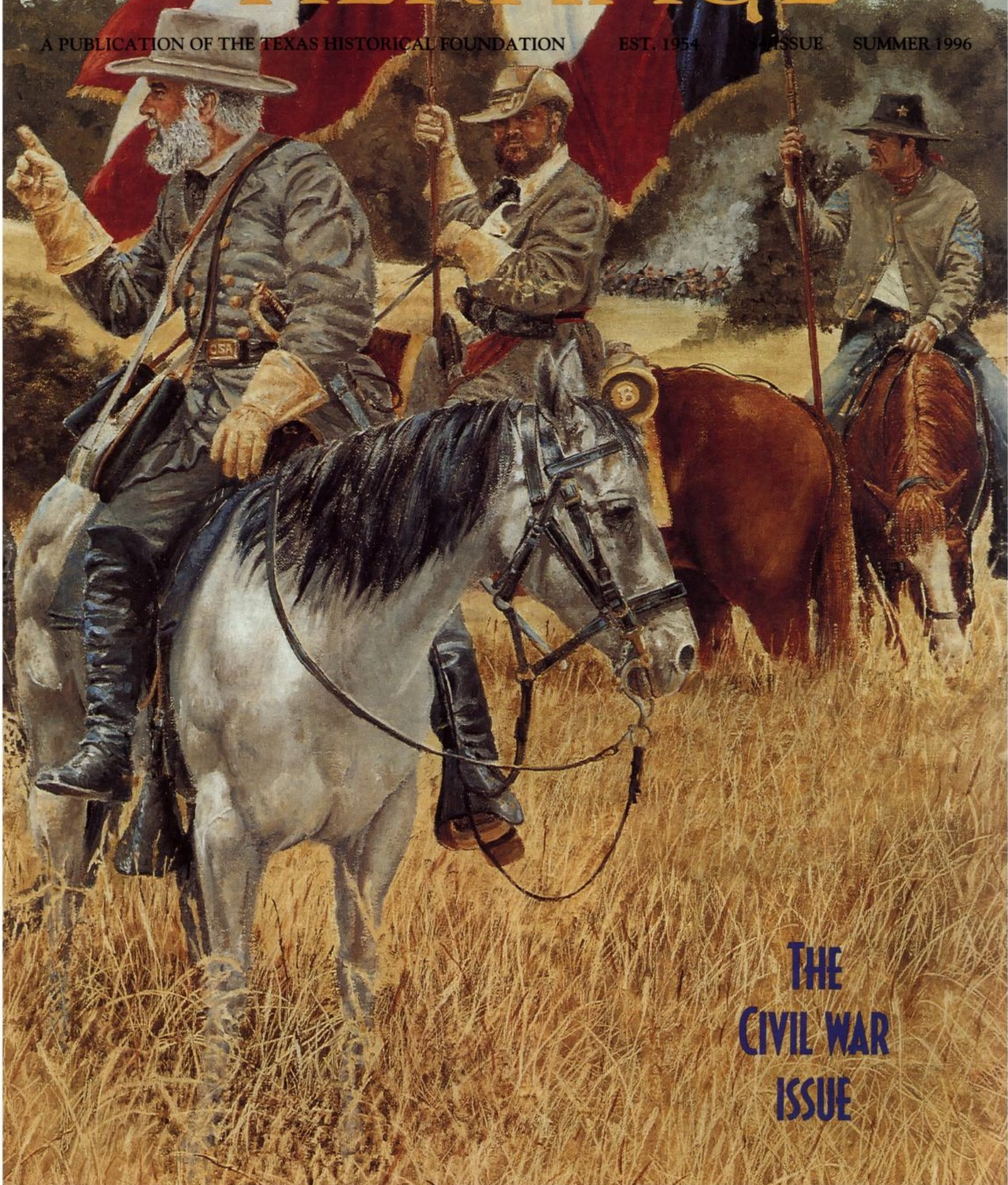
HERITAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

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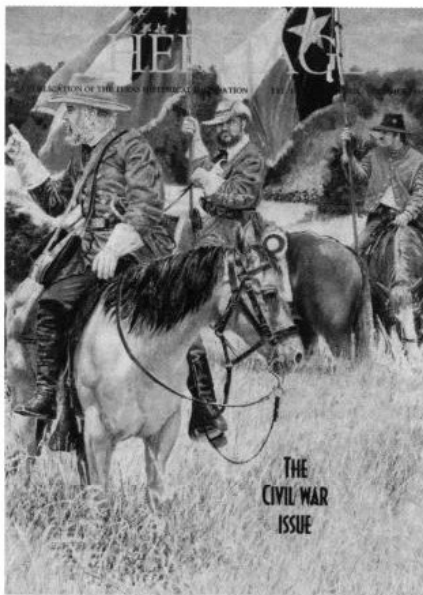
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ISSUE

HERITAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL FOUNDATION EST. 1954 SUMMER 1996

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An Example of Daring and Bravery

General John B. Hood's Texas Brigade



By Edward B. Williams

As the echoes of the Confederate-clad honor guard's final volley faded across the East Texas countryside, the latest footnote to the history of the state's famous Hood's Texas Brigade had been completed. Capt. Isaac N.M. Turner, Company "K", 5th Texas Volunteer Infantry Regiment, was "home at last." The date, April 15, 1995, was, to the day, 132 years since his death in Virginia during the American Civil War.

Capt. Ike Turner was only 24 years of age when he fell victim to a Federal sharpshooter's bullet on the banks of the Nansemond River near the southeastern Virginia community of Suffolk. He and his comrades were members of Hood's Texas Brigade, Gen. Jerome B. Robertson, commanding, Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia, temporarily detached, and operating in that area in the early spring, 1863. Capt. Turner's dying wish was that, "his body be returned home to Texas and buried beside his mother."² However, due to the exigencies of war, his body had been interred at a former family homeplace in Georgia and there it remained for the intervening years. It was only through the efforts of Livingston's Capt. Ike Turner Chapter, Sons of Confederate Veterans, that the young captain's dying wish was realized finally. There were many other members of that valiant band of Texans that never made it back to their homes at all, their bones left to bleach on battlefields extending from Eltham's Landing to Appomattox Court House.

Although during the course of the war there were a number of men who commanded the brigade - Louis T. Wigfall, John B. Hood, William T. Wofford, Jerome B. Robertson, John Gregg, C.M. Winkler, Frederick S. Bass, Robert H. Powell - it was Hood's name with which the Brigade was inextricably linked and that the men of the Brigade revered most.³ Hood was a Kentuckian by birth but a Texan by choice. A West Point graduate of 1853, he was serving in the elite 2nd U.S. Cavalry on the Texas frontier when the war broke out in 1861. Resigning his commission, he offered his services to the Confederate States of America.

Beginning as colonel of the 4th Texas, Hood moved quickly up the chain of command, first to brigade and then division levels in the Army of Northern Virginia. However, it was under Hood's aggressive command in the earlier phases of the war, particularly at Gaines Mill on June 27,

"I would rather have been able to say that I had been a worthy member of Hood's Texas Brigade than to have enjoyed all the honors which have been conferred upon me. I doubt if there has ever been a brigade, or other military organization in the history of the world, that equalled it in the heroic valor and self-sacrificing conduct of its members, and in the brilliancy of its services."

1862, that the Brigade did some of its best fighting. All of the men of the Texas Brigade were volunteers, and John Bell Hood understood volunteer troops. Hood's Texas Brigade it was in those formative, defining times and Hood's Texas Brigade it has remained to this day.

Of the military units furnished by the Lone Star State to the Confederate States of America, only three regiments, the First, Fourth, and Fifth Texas Volunteer Infantry regiments served in Virginia with Gen. Robert E. Lee's fabled Army of Northern Virginia. In the 32 infantry companies that ultimately comprised the three Texas infantry regiments, an estimated 4,000 men served during the course of the war.⁴ The first of these companies, as would be the case with those that followed, were recruited mostly in East and Central Texas and simply straggled to Virginia in the early summer of 1861. They were disappointed not to reach there in time to participate in the first big battle of the war at Manassas (Bull Run), fought on July 21, 1861. They were to find during the next four years that there was violence enough to go around - and then some.

By fall, after experiencing varying degrees of difficulty in reaching the Virginia front, the other companies, save one, finally arrived in Richmond. The last company to be recruited, Company "M", Fifth Texas, did not reach Virginia until August

1862, just in time to be thrown into the bloody fray that was the second battle of Manassas.

During the first winter of the war, while occupying a forward section of the Potomac line around Dumfries, Virginia, the Texas Brigade was organized formally and placed under the command of Brig. Gen. Louis T. Wigfall. Wigfall, a volatile native of South Carolina, proved to be a trying commander, taking alarm at every enemy movement, both real and imagined (Texas Governor Sam Houston called him "Wiggletail"). Few, if any, were grieved when, his having been elected to the Confederate Senate, Wigfall resigned and was soon thereafter replaced by John Bell Hood.

In the inevitable confusion created by the flood of volunteer companies arriving in Richmond in the first months of the war, not much thought was given to organizational matters beyond getting them to the front. Military convention was to have a volunteer infantry brigade comprised of four regiments, preferably from the same state, neighbors fighting shoulder-to-shoulder, so to speak. However, in this situation requiring undue haste, this convention was frequently ignored. In the case of the Texas Brigade, during the first year of its service there were included within its ranks units representing states far removed from the state of Texas - the 18th Georgia Infantry and the infantry companies of Hampton's *South Carolina Legion*.

However, in the aftermath of the great battle at Sharpsburg, Maryland, (Antietam) on September 17, 1862, there was a general reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia. When possible, brigades were organized to include regiments representing the same state, or failing that, nearby states. As a result, the Georgia and South Carolina regiments, having served with distinction (the 18th Georgia was fondly referred to as the 3rd Texas), were transferred to other brigades. There being no other Texas regiments in the Virginia army, the Third Arkansas Volunteer Infantry was joined with the Texas Brigade. Similarly, the Third Arkansas was the only unit from that great state to serve in Virginia and to serve with their Texas neighbors. The addition of this valiant regiment finalized the composition of the Brigade from that time until they reluctantly stacked their arms for the final time and cased their colors at Appomattox Court House in April 1865.



This drawing is of the Texas Brigade in the Devil's Den, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 2, 1863. Their assigned mission was to turn the left flank of the Federal line that had been established along Cemetery Ridge, running south from Gettysburg.

Although during the course of the war there were a number of men who commanded the brigade - Louis T. Wigfall, John B. Hood, William T. Wofford, Jerome B. Robertson, John Gregg, C.M. Winkler, Frederick S. Bass, Robert H. Powell - it was Hood's name with which the Brigade was inextricably linked and that the men of the Brigade revered most.

"To narrate the exploits of Hood's Texas Brigade from 1862 until Appomattox would be to write the history of the campaigns of the Army of Northern Virginia."⁵ The Brigade participated in all of them save Chancellorsville during which time it was on detached duty with Longstreet's Corps in southern Virginia. This absence was more than compensated for by the Brigade's participation in the most fiercely contested battle of the war fought in the West, that at Chickamauga in northwest Georgia in September 1863. Beginning with their first real engagement at Eltham's Landing, Virginia, on May 7, 1862, during the retreat from the Yorktown line at the beginning of the Peninsula campaign, their's was to be a record written in terms of blood and unparalleled valor.

In June 1862, at Gaines Mill, the Brigade faced the first real test of its military mettle when it was thrown against some of the most formidable Federal defensive works it was to encounter during the entire course of the war. Other troops had tried and failed, suffering staggering losses in the attempts. Finally, turning to the then untried Texas Brigade, Gen. Lee asked Gen. Hood if his troops could carry the position. Hood, who had served with Lee in the 2nd U.S. Cavalry on the Texas frontier in happier times, replied simply, "I shall try."

In his memoirs written after the war, Hood, who led the assault personally and on foot, remembered the position as being, "... heavily entrenched upon the side of an elevated ridge. ... At the foot of the slope ran Powhite Creek, which stream together

with the abatis [barricade] in front of their works, constituted a formidable obstruction to our approach, whilst batteries, supported by masses of infantry, crowned the crest of the hill in rear, and long-range guns were posted upon the south side of the Chickahominy [River], in readiness to enfilade our advancing columns."⁶

It was the 4th Texas and 18th Georgia that bore the heaviest burden in the fight that day and William P. Townsend of Company "C", 4th Texas described it as, "... a most horrible fight, every other man was shot down in the Regt. - 257 were killed or wounded out of little over 500."⁷ The 4th Texas' regimental commander, Colonel John Marshall was killed, Lt. Colonel Bradfute Warwick was mortally wounded, and Major G.J.C. Key was severely wounded

and forced to leave the field from loss of blood. Although the other units of the Brigade were engaged, they suffered less heavily. The major portion of the glory won at Gaines Mill belongs to the "Hell-Roaring" 4th Texas, a sobriquet they won that day, and to the 18th Georgia.

Even in the midst of all the carnage and suffering in which they were involved, there were lighter - at least less lethal - moments. In August 1862, on the march to what is now called Second Manassas (Bull Run), the Brigade was involved in the so-called "Roasting Ears" fight. While bivouaced adjacent to a large cornfield, the always-hungry Texans (a condition held in common with all other Confederate soldiers), although forbidden by Army orders to forage, could not resist the lure of food so readily available. However, unknown at the time, the other side of the cornfield was occupied by a large Federal scouting force. Both wandered into the cornfield at the same time. Inevitably, they met near midfield and, "... exchanging derisive remarks, the foragers, either unencumbered by firearms or not wishing to use them, engaged in a real Donnybrook Fair, tossing ears of corn at each other, fist fighting and wrestling for possession of the field. The cries and shouts of the participants along with the violent swaying of the corn tassels soon brought comrades from both sides into the fray. By preponderance of numbers the Texans finally drove [the Federal] scouts from the coveted crops."⁸ Later, in keeping with the law, the Brigade commissary officer purchased the entire crop, all of which the Brigade put to good use.

At Second Manassas, South Mountain, Sharpsburg (Antietam) - in a portion of that terrible field at Sharpsburg known during more peaceful times as Miller's cornfield, it was the 1st Texas that won immortality. According to the official Brigade historian, Joseph Polley, "[t]he First Texas went into battle with 226 men, and lost, in killed and wounded, 186, a loss of eighty-two percent. As one flagbearer would fall, another would seize the flag, until nine men had fallen beneath their colors. Official records show that the First Texas lost more men, killed and wounded, in the battle of Sharpsburg, in proportion to numbers engaged, than any other regiment engaged, either Federal or Confederate, in any other battle of the war. . . . In the aggregate the Texas Brigade went into the fight with 854, rank and file, and lost 519,



Captain Isaac N.M. Turner, C.S.A., served with Hood's Brigade, and was killed in Virginia in 1863. His body was returned to Texas for reinterment last year.

killed and wounded, including sixteen flagbearers, a loss of over sixty percent."⁹

Fredericksburg, Suffolk, Gettysburg - the march to Pennsylvania was long and difficult. John C. West, Co. "E", 4th Texas, remembered the march on June 15th from Culpepper toward Winchester as, "... one of the hottest days and one of the hottest marches I have yet experienced. Over 500 men fell out by the roadside from fatigue and exhaustion, and several died where they fell; this was occasioned by being overheated and drinking cold water in immoderate quantities. . . ."¹⁰

Crossing into Maryland, another of those fleetingly humorous episodes occurred. It was at Hood's personal behest that the Brigade was rewarded for their hard-marching to that point. The reward was a young, exuberant but fatigued infantryman's dream - whiskey - in this instance, whiskey captured from Federal stores near Hagerstown, Maryland. It turned into quite an event but

with unanticipated consequences. According to Joe Polley, the, "... [n]on-imbibing members of the command gave their doles to comrades that liked the stuff, and as a result, it was of the breadth, more than of the length of the road, that many soldiers that afternoon found cause of complaint."¹¹

The ragged Texans were always objects of curiosity and awe to the citizens of the towns and villages through which they marched. In Chamberburg, Pennsylvania, John C. West overheard a woman remark as he passed, "Thank God, you will never come back alive." To which West jauntily replied in the typically confident spirit of the Texas Brigade, "No, as we intend to go to Cincinnati by way of New York."¹² As things turned out this was not to be the case but it was not the result of a lack of will.

At Gettysburg, the Texas Brigade was not called into action until the second day of the great three-day battle - on July 2,

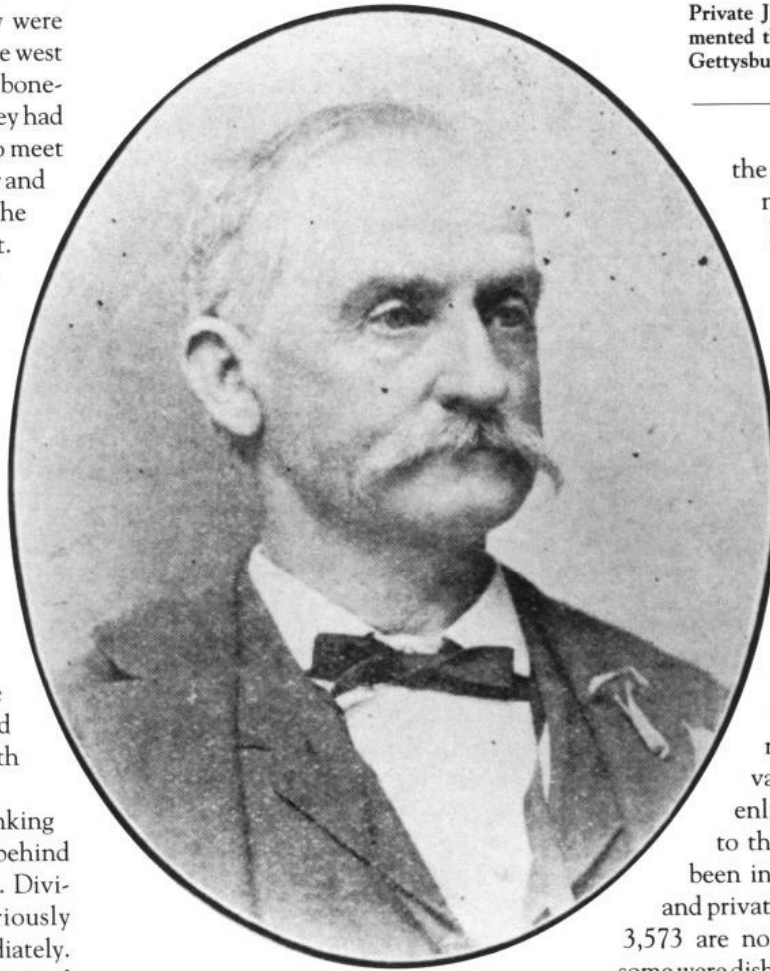
1863. When they were called, they were about 30 miles away, encamped to the west around Chambersburg. After a long, bone-wearying forced march they knew they had reached the field when they began to meet the wounded moving toward the rear and see the battlefield debris left in the wake of the first day's victorious fight.

Then, for much of the day marching and countermarching, they and the other units of their division were moved to the extreme right of the Confederate line by that time strung-out along Seminary Ridge west and south of the town. The portion of the field that their attack was directed toward late that afternoon included such now-familiar sites as Little Round Top, Devil's Den, the Wheat Field, and Rocky Ridge. Their assigned mission was to turn the left flank of the Federal line that had been established along Cemetery Ridge, running south from Gettysburg.

With the late afternoon sun sinking slowly toward the western horizon behind them, they advanced to the attack. Division commander Hood was seriously wounded by shrapnel almost immediately. Later, in his memoirs, Hood observed proudly that, "... [n]ever did a grander, more heroic division enter into battle; nor did ever troops fight more desperately to overcome the insurmountable difficulties against which they had to contend ... in this unsuccessful assault."¹³ Even though the attack was repulsed with heavy losses, Corps commander, Gen. James Longstreet referred to his troop's performance generally that day as, "the best three hours fighting by any troops on any field."

At Chickamauga, a little more than two months after the Gettysburg fight, the Brigade, along with the rest of Longstreet's Corps, found themselves entrained for Georgia. They were going there to aid Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, which, outmaneuvered by Gen. William Rosecrans' Federal Army of the Cumberland, had been forced to give up Chattanooga without a fight.

Hood, not yet recovered from his Gettysburg wound, went with them, left arm in a sling. There he sustained a bullet wound that cost him his right leg, amputated below the hip, and thus ending his direct connection with the Texans. The Brigade was in the van of the great charge



Private John C. West, 4th Texas, documented the Brigade's long, hot march to Gettysburg in the summer of 1863.

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"... [n]ever did a grander,
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able difficulties against
which they had to contend ...*

on the second day of fighting that broke the Federal line and sent them retreating in disorder into Chattanooga.

At Knoxville came the bitter winter of 1863-1864 in which the Brigade suffered more from the effects of the cold and lack of supply and commissary than from enemy action. In the literature of the Brigade, there is more than one mention of bloody footprints left in the snow by shoeless men during that particularly trying winter.

Returning to Virginia in the spring 1864,

the Brigade was in the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor fights, the Petersburg Siege and, finally, April 9, 1865, Appomattox Court House. Official records show that the 1st Texas surrendered at Appomattox, 133 men - the 4th Texas, 145 - the 5th Texas, 149 - and the 3rd Arkansas, 130; making, in the aggregate, 557 officers and privates, as the number of the Texas Brigade who surrendered. The three Texas regiments surrendered 427 officers and privates. Estimating their entire enlistment, from the beginning to the close of the war, to have been in round numbers, of officers and privates, 4,000, it will be seen that 3,573 are not accounted for. Of these, some were dishonorably absent, many hundreds were dead, and many more hundreds were sick or disabled."¹⁴

In the years following the war, wounds, both physical and emotional, healed gradually. In an effort to keep the memory of the Brigade, its service and sacrifices alive," Hood's Texas Brigade Association was formed May 24, 1872, and had its first meeting at Hutchin's House, Houston, Texas."¹⁵ Annual reunions were held from that year forward until 1933, excepting the war years, 1898 and 1918. "Altogether sixty regularly scheduled annual reunions were held. ... Reunions took place in twenty-eight different Texas cities and towns. Bryan, the last home of Hood's Texas Brigade Association, hosted more reunions than any other Texas community. ... The date selected for the annual affairs was June 27. This was the date of the brigade's first great victory of the war, the breakthrough of Fitz John Porter's line at Gaines Mill in 1862."¹⁶

At the 1907 reunion held at Navasota, Texas, a movement was begun to erect a monument to perpetuate the memory of the Brigade. Within three years funds had been raised and at the 1910 reunion, held in Austin, the monument was dedicated and unveiled. "The monument is forty-

four feet high, thirty-five feet of which is the granite shaft and the other nine feet being the statue of a private soldier of the brigade in bronze. . . . Chiseled on the faces of the shaft are quotations from President Jefferson Davis, General Robert E. Lee, General Stephen D. Lee, General Hood, General Albert Sidney Johnston, General Stonewall Jackson and others."¹⁷ The monument is on the Texas State Capitol grounds and should be an object of interest and pride to all who value courage, sacrifice, and the history of our great state.

In a letter written to Hood's Texas Brigade Association a few years later, [former Confederate Postmaster General] Judge John H. Reagan said: "I would rather have been able to say that I had been a worthy member of Hood's Texas Brigade than to have enjoyed all the honors which have been conferred upon me. I doubt if there has ever been a brigade, or other military organization in the history of the world, that equalled it in the heroic valor and self-sacrificing conduct of its members, and in the brilliancy of its services."¹⁸

We led the charge on many a field,
Were first in many a fray
And turned the bloody battle tide,
On many a gloomy day.¹⁹

(Hood's Texas Brigade Association was reactivated in 1966 for descendants of the original members. The Association now meets every other year in Hillsboro, Texas.)

Edward B. Williams is an independent scholar who lives in Dickinson. He is editor of the book, "Rebel Brothers, The Civil War Letters of the Truehearts", recently published by Texas A&M University.

Bibliography and Author's Note:

Author's Note: The title of this article is a quote from a letter written by Gen. Robert E. Lee to Senator Louis T. Wigfall in Harold B. Simpson, "Hood's Texas Brigade: A Biographical Sketch." Address delivered before the Texas Sesquicentennial Civil War Symposium on Hood's Texas Brigade, Fort Worth, Texas, May 31, 1986. Confederate Research Center, Hill College, Hillsborough, Texas, Hood's Texas Brigade File 8-2, 7.

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19. Quoted in Simpson, "Hood's Texas Brigade", title page.

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